

Suggested Remarks
Ambassador Darryl Johnson
Launch of the Philippine Tropical Forest
Conservation Foundation
PTFCF Office, Legaspi Towers 300,
Roxas Boulevard, Manila
September 7, 2005, 4:30 p.m.

Honorable Michael Defensor, Secretary,
Department of Environment and Natural
Resources;

Mr. Ma. Lorenzo Tan, Chairman of the Board,
Philippine Tropical Forest Conservation
Foundation Board;

Esteemed Members of the Foundation Board;
Representatives of Non-Government Organizations
devoted to forest conservation;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

MAGANDANG HAPON SA INYONG LAHAT! (Good
afternoon to all of you)

Let me begin by congratulating the Board of the
Philippine Tropical Forest Conservation
Foundation and the bilateral Technical Working
Group, who have worked long and hard to make
the Foundation a reality! Your commitment,
expertise, and persistence as individuals, and

diversity as a group have brought us here to launch a new institution.

The U.S. Government created the TFCA program in 1998, because we recognize that rapid tropical deforestation and forest degradation are serious problems in many regions of the world. At the same time, we recognize that alleviation of external debt can reduce economic pressures on countries, leaving room for increased protection of tropical forests.

Protection, however, is a challenge. And as we have learned through efforts around the world, it is critical to allow economic benefits to local communities from sustainable uses of these forests.

By redirecting financial resources to tropical forest conservation efforts, the TFCA program

represents a win-win opportunity. At the same time that resources are generated for tropical forest conservation, participating countries benefit from cashflow relief as well as financial leverage.

By participating in the Tropical Forest Conservation Act (TFCA) Program, the Philippines joins Bangladesh, Belize, El Salvador, Peru and Panama as countries committed to working with the United States to convert national debt into resources for the conservation of valuable tropical forests. Since the United States Government launched this innovative program, we have signed TFCA agreements that will generate over \$60 million in forest conservation funds in the years ahead.

The milestones that led us all here today, to this brand new office of the Foundation, reflect three things: commitment, consultation and collaboration. The TFCA program is a sign of the commitment of the United States and Philippine Governments to reduce debt *and* protect tropical forests in a way that benefits local communities that depend upon those forests. As a result of this commitment, \$8.25 million will be available for conservation efforts of NGOs.

This new Foundation is the result of extensive *consultation* between governments and the NGO sector. In fact, the Foundation Board is unique in that civil society identified the NGO members through a consultative process supported by USAID back in 2002. Though they currently work with NGOs, these members serve in their individual capacities, as

representatives of the NGO community in general and their own region of the country in particular.

And finally, *collaboration* among all parties has been the critical success factor. The bilateral, inter-agency working group of the Department of Finance, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, US Embassy, and USAID, and the members of the Foundation Board, have worked consistently and collaboratively to implement the agreements and bring us all here today.

As we issue today the Philippine Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation's first call for proposals, I'd like to offer a special word of encouragement to the members of the Board. The Philippines is blessed with some beautiful

natural spaces - I've already seen some of them in the short time I've been here.

But there are threats and challenges. You have before you an opportunity to do creative and meaningful things, to help improve the lives of Filipinos today and in future generations, by supporting conservation efforts that reflect local realities and produce results. Plan well the strategic impact this foundation can have. Be innovative. And continue the spirit of commitment, consultation and collaboration that has brought us here today.

Once again, congratulations. I wish you much success. MABUHAY!

